

WHAT, WHO AND WHY?

This is a oneshot Apocalypse World scenario called Sunken Sydney for an MC and 3-5 players. The name comes from the user "noofy" at the AW forums, but has nothing to do with that person otherwise. It was written as a collaborative effort by various people that hang around www.rollspel.nu.

The following people contributed to a larger or lesser extent:

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Like "Blind-Blue & Hatchet city" this is sort of meant to be session 4 of an AW campaign. Love letters to each player containing custom moves set the tone and some of the background for the game.

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TO DO BEFORE PLAYING:

- Make sure you know how to be the Master of Ceremonies in an AW game.
- Read through this scenario carefully. Make sure you are familiar with the "dear ____" letters and the 2 fronts of the scenario.
- Fantasize about Sunken Sydney. The locations, the people, the environment, but don't commit yourself to anything specific.
- Find some enthusiastic players. 5 is optimal, but as few as 3 is okay.
- Hand out the letters. Oversee character creation and then the moves in the letters.
- The hocus rolls for Fortunes. Then start the session and hit the waterways of Sunken Sydney!

SUNKEN SYDNEY

Sydney; An overgrown, partly sunken city. Buildings and skyscrapers are falling apart, either by themselves or from the falling bombs at the end of the golden age that was. Swamps and river infested with alligators now occupy that which used to be streets. Toxic, hungry vegetation eats away at everything. It is always raining, and when it is not, there is the thick fog that make it impossible to notice the alligator and enormous snakes before they are all over you. Beyond the city lies only the scorched desert. Perhaps someone lives out there, who knows and who cares?

The inhabitants scavenge in the buildings, hunt the alligators for skinn and meat and fight over scraps and dry-zones. They get around on whatever they can find that floats. A lucky few has access to real boats, even ones with electric motors. Wind turbines and solar panel provied the energy needed. When the makeshift pieces-of-crap work that is.

Sunken Sydney used to be ruled by the Hardholder Barnum. But he disappeared recently. Perhaps he is dead, nobody seems to know. His gangs has scattered and people are worried. Who will fill the vaccum?

The Hocus, preaching the gospel of the Brainworms? The Chopper and his violent bastards who rides through the city on jetskis? The influential Maestro D'? What will the mysterious Battlebabe/Faceless do? And the Angel, will he broker peace or claim power for himself?

Then there's the Sub-people who arrived in a huge black submarine shortly after Barnum went missing. Where they came from is unclear but what is certain is that they are desperate for supplies and extremely well armed.

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED WHILE PLAYING:

Things are left deliberately vague in this scenario. What the people and the places are like, what is important about them and what they do will be decided in-game. Ask the players questions like crazy! This might help you; a list of things left unanswered.

- What happened to Barnum the Hardholder?
- What is the Hardholders old place like? Is it the center of Sunken Sydney, or is that something else?
- What does the city look like?
- What kind of barter is common?
- What is needed to make Bliss? Ingredients? Equipment?
- Where does the Brainworms come from? How do they affect people and what do they want?
- What are the demands of the Sub-people, and what is their weakness?
- What kind of equipment do the Sub-people possess? How are they organized?

Things you might want to ask individual characters:

- What does your place look like? What's your favourite possession?
- What do you prefer to use for barter?
- What's the maelstrom like?
- Who do you live with, sleep with, work with?
- Why is this person a problem for you?
- Why is this person important to you?
- Why is this person dear to you?
- Why do you need this person?
- What have you done together with this person?
- What does this person know about you that'd land you in shit if someone else found out?
- How did this person fuck you over? Why haven't you taken revenge yet?

CHARACTERS

Below are the characters of Sunken Sydney listed. The players can choose to play whichever one they want, as long as someone plays the Angel. Naturally the hardholder can't be played cuz, y'know, dead and gone. And to be crystal clear, there is a Faceless OR a Battlebabe, not both.

- XHardholder - There used to be a Hardholder, Barnum. But he's gone now and left behind a serious power vacuum behind. Friends become foes, acquaintances turn into allies and strangers need to be kept away. Everything is uncertain and there is no status quo.
- Angel
- Hocus
- Chopper
- Maestro D'
- Faceless/Battlebabe

DEAR HOCUS,

Go ahead and create your character, following the rules in the playbook, with one exception. Make a choice for your Followers that replace "want: desertion" with something else. Once the Brainworm has done the sacred burrowing through flesh, it stays put.

With the timely disappearance of Barnum, the Hardholder who used to rule Sunken Sydney, you are now free to hold court in the majestic, rusty remains of the opera house which serves as your temple. To spread the gospel of the Flesh-burrowing Brainworms to Sunken Sydneys weak and needy.

And they need you, oh yes they do! The weak and needy and the Brainworms alike. They come to you and together work towards the greater destiny of Sunken Sydney and yourself.

But all is not well. Many heretics, untouched by the Brainworm, still prowl the waterways of the city. And the appearance of the Sub-People, in their floating black cylinder, with demands and guns untempered by the Brainworm, threaten what you are trying to build in the wake of Barnums disappearance.

After you've made your character, before the session starts, I'll ask you how strong your influence through the Gospel of the Brainworms really is. Roll +weird. On a hit, choose some of the following to be true. On a 10+, choose 3, on a 7-9 choose 2:

- Your flock has grown quickly lately. It now consist of about 50 people.
- Barbarossa, a local violent dickhead with a gang (2-harm gang small 2-armor) has chosen to embrace the gospel of the Brainworm.
- One of the Sub-people, Butch, came to you seeking info on Sunken Sydney. The sacred burrowing took place, and he now follows the Brainworm.
- The Brainworms hear your voice, regardless of where they are. You get the Brainer move In-brain puppet string.

On a miss choose 1 of the above anyway, but there is also Grome the Slasher, who was once infected by your Brainworm, but something happend. S/he now hides in the ruins, stalking the weak and you can sense that s/he is coming for you.

Regardless of how you rolled your Brainworm countdown starts at 6 o'clock.

Some people of yours:

Jackabacka, you trust completely. Momo, you got your eyes on. Rampart shows potential.

In addition to the moves in your playbook you, and anyone who has undergone the sacred burrowing, get the following move:

When the Brainworm burrows deeper into your brain mark the next segment on the Brainworm countdown. This always happens the first time the hocus uses In-brain puppet strings on you and can also happen when you open your brain to the mealstrom or when you're under stress.

Brainworm countdown:

0-3: You now hear the gospel of the Brainworm.

3-6: Whenever you oppose the will of the Brainworm you are acting under fire.

6-9: You get +1 weird.

9-10: Whenever you adhere to the will of the Brainworm you take +1 forward.

10-11: You get +1 to a stat of you choice (max +3).

11-12: You are now part of the Brainworm consciousness.

Love and wet kisses,

Your MC

DEAR ANGEL,

Go ahead and create your character, following the rules in the playbook.

Barnum is dead and Sunken Sydney is now leaderless, with several groups fighting for power over the waterways and dry-zones, and the recently arrived Sub-people making demands from their huge black cylinder in the harbour. The people of Sunken Sydney walk a fine line between addiction to Bliss and subjection to the Brainworm. The Maestro`D holds monopoly over Bliss and the Hocus spreads the gospel of the Brainworm from the rusty remains of the opera house. Without Barnum the city is succumbing to chaos and violence. A leader is obviously needed, and there is no shortage of self-procalimed candidates.

You have a roomy boat and go where you please. Usually there is no problem, cuz you know, everyone needs to be stitched up sometimes.

Some people you know:

Hail Mary you look after, pretty but stupid as a brick.

Honeytree (one of the Maestro D's people) has entrusted a secret to you.

Barker (one of the Chopper's gang) owe you for saving hir life.

Rampart (one of the Hocus' people) comes to see you regularly.

After you´ve made your character, before the session starts, I´ll ask what you´ve been up to lately. Roll +sharp. On a hit, choose some of the following to be true. On a 10+, choose 3, on a 7-9 choose 2:

- You´ve figured out how to remove the Brainworms (sorta) safely. Roll +stock spent. On a 10+ they suffer 1-harm (ap) and the worm is gone. On a 7-9 move their Brainworm clock back as many steps as you inflict harm (ap). On a miss they move their clock forward one step.
- You´ve discovered how to make Bliss yourself. But to do it you need supplies from down below the water.
- You helped Barbarossa, a violent prick with a gang, a while back and now he owes you big time.
- You've worked your ass off to equip your boat. Take the Infirmary move as an improvement right away.

On a miss, choose 1 of the first two, and everyone knows that you can do it.

Love and wet kisses,

Your MC

DEAR CHOPPER,

Go ahead and create your character and your gang, following the rules in the playbook. Oh, and your jetski too. Yeah baby! You and your gang roll on water.

Here in Sunken Sydney you have it made. Violence, sex and power are all yours. You and your pack of violent bastards roam the waterways smashed out on Bliss, the drug of choice. When not on water, Hammer, Tum Tum, Barker, Toto and many more in your gang try to score some more Bliss. Unfortunately there is a monopoly on the thing and there is only one place to get it.

The problem is that after Barnum, the Hardholder who used to run this place, died all the weirdos came out, Brainworms and all. The leader of this cult resides in the old shitty opera house. You went to one of the sermons, but you're not sure if it's for you. Though your Brainworm countdown is now at 6 o'clock nonetheless. There is also the Sub-people from outside who recently showed up in their big-ass submarine and started making threats.

After you made your character, before the session starts, I'll ask you who's jealous and you say, everybody! Roll +Hard. On a hit, choose some of the following to be true. On 10+ choose 1, on a 7-9 choose 2. On a miss, tough luck, you get all.

- Your gang used to be larger, but this shithead named Barbarossa took a bunch of your guys and you are now fighting with them over the few dry spots there are.
- Gnarly, the biggest badass in your gang have been acting strange recently. Last night when you asked them to chill s/he gave you that strange look again.
- Some guys in your gang have been talking about the Brainworm thing, and are going to the sermons in the opera house regularly.

Love and wet kisses,
Your MC

DEAR MAESTRO D'

Go ahead and create your character and their establishment, following the rules in the playbook. You have a crew of talented and precious people working for you: Brace, Honeytree, Southwest and Crin. Might be sex, might be cooking, might be entertainment, your call.

In a ruined world, you still hold a piece of pleasure alive. In a city falling in on itself, you still hold a little piece of order in your hand. No shit happens in your establishment unless you already approved it. You've carved this place out of misery and violence, and you are not going to watch passively while it all goes to shit, even if it means taking control of this hold yourself. The customers must come and the Bliss must flow.

After you've made your character, before the session starts, I'll ask you how well prepared you really are for this shit. Roll +Hot. On a hit, choose some of the following to be true. On a 10+, pick 2. On a 7-9, pick 1.

- You predicted this day would come. You have a secret stash of weapons, medical supplies, a savvyhead workshop, or high quality food, tools and hardware. (Pick two)
- Barbarossa, The Chopper, The Angel or the The Faceless/Battlebabe is hooked on Bliss (Also, see Maestro D' Special).
- You have a trusty spy named Roark, who has joined the Brainworm cult and gotten a notch above the novices.

On a miss, you have Roark in place, but his Brainworm clock is at 9 o'clock.

You are the sole distributor of Bliss in Sunken Sydney, a potent drug that makes the user more Cool, Hard, Sharp or Hot, your choice. It also shuts the maelstrom and brain-worms' influence out of your brain. The Faceless/Battlebabe supply you with the necessary components and equipment to distill the drug.

Whenever you or someone else takes Bliss, make this custom move:

While under the influence of Bliss, the Brainworm clock does not advance. Wierd rolls made by you or against you are at -1 Ongoing. Also, take +1 Forward to the relevant stat, and you are Acting under fire the next time you resist an offer of Bliss.

Love and wet kisses,
Your MC

DEAR FACELESS

Go ahead and create your character, following the rules in your rulebook. Your mask is a scuba gear mask.

The people live on the few dry spots of land or tall buildings that exists in Sunken Sydney. You can hear them walking and talking, partying and sometimes killing when you go to sleep in the ruins. In the mornings, sometimes you go underwater for supplies or food. Or maybe you eat. You even walk among them. They fascinate you and you pretend to be one of them, but we both know you aren't.

What are people? Friends to be won? Monsters to be punished? Precious things to be tended for? Prey to be hunted?

You do have a few friends, and maybe one or two who gives you things you need, tell you what to do. The Maestro needs Bliss, and you are the only one who can bring the sunken magic toys and ingredients up to the surface. Even underwater you are a powerful beast, as I give you the gift of air. You are a true creature of both land and water, and I am your true face.

After you've made your character, before the session starts, I'll ask your mask what is wrong with you. Roll +hard. On a hit choose some of the following to be true. On a 10+, choose 2, on a 7-9 choose 3:

- This morning you woke up in your den next to Hail Mary, who's pretty but dumb as a brick, and with no recollection of the last few days.
- Barbarossa, a local violent dickhead with a gang, was stupid enough to touch your mask. So you ripped out the eyes of his boytoy Fluffy. He may want revenge.
- You've developed a taste for human flesh. In fact, your mask refuses to come of for any other kind of food.
- You killed the hardholder who, until recently, ruled Sunken Sydney. One of the other characters ordered/bribed/forced you to do it (choose who and tell their player that you killed Barnum on their order). Another knows that you did it (choose who and tell their player that you killed Barnum).

On a miss all 4 are true. Your mask says it's okay though.

In addition to the moves in your playbook you, or anyone who uses your scuba gear, get the following move:

When you go below, roll +cool. On a hit you find an oddment worth 1-barter (this could be supplies to make enough Bliss for a couple of people). On a 10+, choose 2. On a 7-9 choose 1.

- You find it quickly.
- You don't run into any alligators. Which chew on you for 1-harm (ap).
- You find a thing that's valuable.
- You find a thing that's hi-tech.

On a miss your air compressor gives out, a valve cracks in your gear or some other thing breaks that you can't fix without supplies and/or help.

Love and wet kisses,
Your MC

DEAR BATTLEBABE,

Go ahead and create your character, following the rules in your rulebook.

Sunken Sydney. When the hardholder Barnum ruled the place it was a stinking shithole. Now that s/he's gone it's... well still a stinking shithole, but at least now no-one is riding your ass to do this and that. Gangs roam across the waterways and vie for power over the various dry-zones. In the rusty crap of an opera house a mad bastard spreads his belief in the sacred Brainworm. From one of the few remaining dry-zones another offers Bliss, a small comfort from the pain of life - for a price. Some days they seem like decent allies, some you just want to (and do!) gut them and feed their remains to the alligators. Others you just fuck them all and go below.

In your possession you have scuba gear (worn hi-tech refill) and an air compressor (loud hi-tech), which lets you explore the sunken parts of the city. This is where you gather the supplies needed to make Bliss, as well as other shit.

After you've made your character, before the session starts, I'll ask you what the fuck is wrong with you, you psycho! Roll +cool. On a hit choose some of the following to be true. On a 10+, choose 2, on a 7-9 choose 3:

- This morning you woke up in your den next to Hail Mary, who's pretty but dumb as a brick, and with no recollection of the last few days.
- Barbarossa, a local violent dickhead with a gang, was making one demand or other, so you ripped out the eyes of their boytoy/fungirl Fluffy. He may want revenge or whatever.
- You've developed a taste for human flesh. In fact, any other food just makes you throw up.
- You killed the hardholder who, until recently, ruled Sunken Sydney. One of the other characters ordered/bribed/forced you to do it (choose who and tell their player that you killed Barnum on their order). Another knows that you did it (choose who and tell their player that you killed Barnum).

On a miss all 4 are true. There really is something seriously wrong with you.

In addition to the moves in your playbook you, or anyone who uses your scuba gear, get the following move:

When you go below, roll +cool. On a hit you find an oddment worth 1-barter (this could be supplies to make enough Bliss for a couple of people). On a 10+, choose 2. On a 7-9 choose 1.

- You find it quickly.
- You don't run into any alligators. Which chew on you for 1-harm (ap).
- You find a thing that's valuable.
- You find a thing that's hi-tech.

On a miss your fucking air compressor gives out, a valve cracks in your gear or some other bloody thing breaks that you can't fix without supplies and/or help.

Love and wet kisses,
Your MC

FRONTS

If the game is moving at a good pace, you actually never have to use these. Use what the players are interested in, do what is needed to get the game going.

The Brainworms

- **Fundamental scarcity:** Ambition
- **Dark future:** Sunken Sydney becomes a mindless(?) host for the Brainworms, with the Hocus no more than a puppet to it's will.
- **Threats**
 - Slaver: The Hocus, controlling people for his ends or "selling" them to the brain-worms (not to be used if someone chooses to play the Hocus).
 - Delusion: The Brainworms dominates and control peoples actions.
 - Cult: The infected ones and the followers of the Hocus, victimizes and incorporates other people.
 - Cannibal: The God-Mouth of the Brainworms, craves satiety and plenty.
- **Stakes**
 - Who will give themselves, or be given, to the Brainworms?
 - Will the Hocus stay in control of his cult?
 - Will someone find a way to control or root out the Brainworms?
- **Infection countdown**
 - 0-3 There is a steady trickle of cultists arriving in the Opera House.
 - 3-6 The Hocus followers have increased in number, and a few (small gang) are armed. Signs that some cultists are acting on another will than that of the Hocus.
 - 6-9 The Hocus followers have doubled, but also split into subgroups.. By now it's pretty fucking clear that these worms will start spreading out of control.
 - 9-10 Even more followers. The Hocus is in control of them just as often as he is not. Many are armed.
 - 10-11 Cultists are waging war on and converting all heretics.
 - 11-12 We are the Brainworm. Heretics are hunted men and women.
- **Individual countdown**
 - 0-3: You now hear the gospel of the Brainworm.
 - 3-6: Whenever you oppose the will of the Brainworm you are acting under fire.
 - 6-9: You get +1 weird.
 - 9-10: Whenever you adhere to the will of the Brainworm you take +1 forward.
 - 10-11: You get +1 to a stat of you choice (max +3).
 - 11-12: You are now part of the Brainworm consciousness.

The Decay

- **Fundamental scarcity:** Decay
- **Dark future:** Without a leader, Sunken Sydney will start collapsing in on itself. Different groups start fighting for scraps, splintering the hold. Infrastructure and trade falls apart, leaving houses flooded and depleting food and medical supplies.
- **Threats**
 - Custom: Take by force what you need before someone else does.
 - Condition: No-one is maintaining the pumps anymore, Sunken Sydney could get flooded, exposing people to danger.
 - Condition: Hunger and disease spreads as supplies are cut off and plundered.
 - Sybarites/Cult: Barbarossa and his men take what they need, or victimize and incorporate for the Brainworm cult.
 - Maze: The city is a swamp-maze of buildings and vines, travel alone and you might get lost, trapped or exposed to danger.
 - Hive Queen: Reno, leader of the Sub-people, will take what he needs and leaves ruins behind, if he has to.
 - Dictator: As more and more people become permanently addicted to Bliss, the Maestro'D uses this to take control of Sunken Sydney (not to be used if someone chooses to play the Maestro'D).
- **Stakes**
 - Who, that the PCs care about, will become weak and sick?
 - Who will be robbed or kidnapped for ransom?
 - Will a new hardholder arise? Who would that be?
 - Will the Sub-people attack Sunken Sydney?
- **Countdown**
 - 0-3 Some people have started to plunder others with no authority holding them back.
 - 3-6 Lots of people are now hungry or sick.
 - 6-9 You need a lot of barter and the right contacts to get what you want, unless you take it by force.
 - 9-10 An eerie silence.
 - 10-11 Anarchy, war, fighting for survival.
 - 11-12 Sunken Sydney is barren, poisoned, ruined. Survivors leave for the wilderness, or resort to cannibalism.

Home front

- **Threats**
 - Hunting pack: Barbarossa and their gang. Impulse: to victimize anyone vulnerable.
 - Mirage: The old shipwreck. Impulse: to entice and betray people.
 - Furnace: The great machine. Impulse: to consume things.
 - Mutant: The Faceless from Below. Impulse: craves restitution, recompense (not to be used if someone chooses to play the Faceless).
 - Breeding Pit: The Black Lagoon at the center of the city. Impulse: to generate badness.
 - Fortress: The Old Stadium. (Impulse: To deny access)
 - The Monorail Spine. (Impulse: To bridge gaps)
 - Maze: The undergrowth floors (Impulse: To trap, to frustrate passage)

NPCS

Here's a list of all the NPCs named in the MC love letters. Make sure you place them as a threat according to a fundamental scarcity as you introduce them, and remember to ask questions like crazy to build PC-NPC-PC triangles. Invent and introduce characters as you go along, and the players should too: Have them tell you about their people.

Throughout the text, I use gender-neutral pronoms. I make a big deal out of names not signifying gender, and I suggest you do too, so make sure to ask about gender. (Male, female, ambiguous, concealed, transgressing, anddrygonous?)

Barnum, missing hardholder.

Barbarossa, leader of a bunch of violent shitheads.

Fluffy, Barbarossas boytoy. Might be blinded by the Faceless/Battlebabe.

Grome the Slasher, might be corrupted by brainworms.

Hammer, a member of the Chopper's gang.

Tum Tum, a member of the Chopper's gang.

Barker, a member of the Chopper's gang, the Angel saved hir life.

Toto, a member of the Chopper's gang.

Gnarly, a member of the Chopper's gang that might be trouble.

Brace, one of the Maestro D's people.

Honeytree, one of the Maestro D's people, entrusted a secret to the Angel.

Southwest, one of the Maestro D's people.

Crin, one of the Maestro D's people.

Roark, might be a spy for the Maestro D'.

Hail Mary, pretty but stupid as a brick. Might have slept with the Faceless/Battlebabe.

Jackabacka, the Hocus trusts completely.

Momo, the Hocus got hir eyes on.

Rampart, one of the Hocus people, show potential. Comes to see the Angel regularly.